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Child Agency and Integration of Unaccompanied Minors in Sicily

Abstract: The paper presents a normative framework concerning unaccompanied minors (UAMs) in Italy, as well as best practices and reveals the findings of the Horizon 2020 MiCREATE project's research, carried out in Sicily from September 2020 until April 2021. The aim of the research was to better understand (1) the legal and social framework of the established reception system in Italy in order to protect and support unaccompanied minors and (2) their perception of this system, as the final beneficiaries

The research revealed that even if the Italian legislation generally address the rights of the unaccompanied minors and provides a comprehensive framework for protecting UAMs, several protection gaps exist. For example, the Italian guardianship model is reliant on volunteers and suffers significant bureaucratic delays; accommodation for unaccompanied minors is poorly managed through private contracting arrangements that show evidence of corruption and children, after being wrongly assessed to be over 18 years old, often become homeless.

Keywords: reception system, integration, unaccompanied minors, Sicily

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Agencija za otroke in integracija mladoletnikov brez spremstva na Siciliji

Izveček: Članek predstavlja normativni okvir in dobre prakse postopanja z mladoletnimi migranti brez spremstva v Italiji ter opisuje izsledke raziskave projekta Obzorje 2020 MiCREATE, ki je potekala na Siciliji od septembra 2020 do aprila 2021. Cilj raziskave je bil razumeti (1) pravni in družbeni okvir sistema za zaščito ter podporo mladoletnikom brez spremstva in (2) njihovo doživljanje tega sistema z vidika končnih uporabnikov storitev.

Raziskava je razkrila, da kljub temu da italijanska zakonodaja na splošno priznava pravice mladoletnih migrantov brez spremstva in zagotavlja celovit okvir za njihovo zaščito, v tej zaščiti obstaja več vrzeli. Posebno problematično je dejstvo, da je italijanski model skrbništva odvisen od prostovoljcev in se sooča z znatnimi birokratskimi zamudami, da je nastanitev za mladoletnike brez spremstva upravljana prek zasebnih pogodbenih dogovorov, ki so izpostavljeni korupciji, da so otroci, za katere se domneva, da so starejši od 18 let, pogosto izpostavljeni breždomstvu, in tako naprej.

Ključne besede: sprejemni sistem, integracija, mladoletniki brez spremstva, Sicilija

Introduction

Italy has remained one of the main reception countries for unaccompanied minors (UAMs) in Europe, receiving minors both from the Mediterranean route and the Balkan one. In Sicily, according to the monitoring report on UAMs in Italy (as of June 2019) and data retrieved from the General Directorate of Immigration and Integration Policy under the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, 4,758 UAMs were hosted, which accounts for 42 per cent of the total UAMs in Italy. The reasons for fleeing their home countries are often recurrent: the search for better living conditions for one's future and personal security, escape from conflict, persecution, extreme poverty and hunger (Ambrosetti and Paparusso 2018, 151-171). The absence of adult references in many cases produces serious consequences linked to the fate of the child as they risk becoming victims of violence, abuse, exploitation and mistreatment, as well as entering the prostitution business among others.

Reception system of the UAMs in Italy is characterised by a normative framework that, in its continuous evolutions, has been particularly advanced and protective of minors that arrive in Italy unaccompanied by adult caregivers. In addition, there have been different examples of separate initiatives, mainly run by the non-governmental organisations, to support migrant children in transition. Despite the advanced normative framework and different laws in favour of protection and support to UAMs, they are sporadic and not consistently coordinated at the national level. Despite good practices, there are still several integration challenges and different gaps between the policy and practice in the protection of UAMs in Italy, which also encourage secondary migration of UAMs.

This article presents findings linked to the current situation of the UAMs in Italy, which were collected based on desk-based research, participant observation and interviews with minors and professionals in Sicilian reception centres.

Normative Framework Concerning Unaccompanied Minors

The protection of unaccompanied minors in Italy mainly derives from the transposition of the International and European standards and Regulations, while taking into account national rules and a number of laws that address the rights of unaccompanied minors: from the so-called Martelli Law n. 39 of 1990 to the Bossi-Fini Law n. 189 of 2002 regarding immigration and asylum.

In March 2017, Italy became the first European country to legislate a comprehensive framework concerning the protection and treatment of unaccompanied minors, focusing on the best interests of the child- with the ‘Provisions on protective measures for unaccompanied foreign minors’, often referred to as the Zampa Law n. 47 of 2017. This law establishes a protection system and safeguarding of UAMs in an articulation of competences between the central and peripheral administration, seeking to ensure greater uniformity in the application of the provisions throughout the territory of Italy. This legislation defines an unaccompanied foreign minor thusly: ‘an unaccompanied foreign minor present in the territory of the State means a minor who does not have Italian or European Union citizenship and who is located, for any reason, in the territory of the State or who is otherwise subject to Italian jurisdiction, without assistance and representation from parents or other adults legally responsible for him or her according to the laws in force in the Italian legal system’ (Zampa Law 2017, Article 2). From a legal perspective, foreign minors hold the same rights

and are entitled to receive the same treatment as national Italian minors. Indeed, they are protected primarily as minors without any form of legal guardianship, and only later, if they have applied for protection, as beneficiaries of international protection.

The mentioned Zampa Law (2017) recognises these minors as vulnerable subjects with rights. They can directly apply for a residence permit at their local police station, even without the appointment of a legal guardian. The ‘right to be listened’ is also established for unaccompanied foreign minors in the administrative and judicial proceedings that concern them, while the right to legal assistance is guaranteed and comes at the expense of the State (*idem.*). The Law consolidates the principle according to which the setting up of reception services includes services specifically targeted to the requirements of minors: specialised centres for rescue and protection with trained personnel and respective of the standards established by the Decree of the Minister of the Interior (Zampa Law 2017, Article 12).

This Law also reshapes the identification procedure for minors in a harmonised manner throughout the territory of Italy: this is the fundamental step for the assessment of age, on which in turn depends the possibility of applying protection measures for minors (Zampa Law 2017, Article 5).

In addition, local authorities have the task of raising awareness and training the carers who are able to accommodate unaccompanied minors. In fact, the law favours the placement of the minor within households (including an active search for family members of the minor within the Italian territory) rather than placing them in a host community. Each Juvenile Court has a list of voluntary guardians available to assist one or more unaccompanied foreign minors (Zampa Law 2017, Article 11). With regard to long-term assistance measures, the rule reiterates the possibility of requesting the minor to be assigned to social services up to the age of 21 years

old for those minors who have embarked on a path of integration, but who require prolonged assistance and support when they reach the age of majority (Zampa Law 2017, Article 13).

Within the process of integration, UAMs are registered in the national healthcare system and have the right to access preventive treatments (e.g., vaccinations). Once a guardian (a person whose duty is the support of the minor throughout the path of inclusion in the host community, including bureaucratic proceedings) is identified, the State guarantees the right to education. The host community or the foster family will be involved in finding a school and proceed with the enrolment process, including language courses. This is crucial, as a sufficient level of Italian is necessary in order to renew their permits of stay, take up an employment and feel like a part of the host society. However, scholars note that, despite the increase of interest regarding educational programmes for foreigners, far too little attention is paid to educational programs specifically addressed to unaccompanied minors in school settings (Augelli, Lombi and Triani 2018, 144-158).

Overall, the Italian normative framework concerning UAMs fully incorporates International and European standards, is comprehensive and includes innovative points to better support unaccompanied minors in Italy.

Italian Good Practices in the Field of Reception and Integration of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors

In regards to the social framework in Italy supporting migrant children in transition, there is also a series of good practices in favour of the reception and integration of unaccompanied foreign minors alongside the normative framework. The best practices presented in this section demonstrate the willingness and motivation of different entities (strongly promoted by the non-governmental field) to foster

processes of integration of unaccompanied minors, the social cohesion, the protection of their rights, and the path towards independence. Some of them are presented below and underline that there is a wide range of different initiatives linked to the development of social and professional skills, integration practices or other issues.

The *Ciclofficina* project³ (literally meaning bike workshop), promoted by the Municipality of Udine and the Association ‘*Nuovi Cittadini Onlus*’, started in 2015, is a space equipped for the ordinary maintenance of bicycles, with services open to all citizens in the community. It has allowed UAMs to acquire basic skills in bicycle mechanics as well as skills related to broader topics, such as sustainability and road safety.

Notably, there is the Memorandum of Understanding signed by the association of Italian Municipalities (ANCI) and the Italian National Olympic Committee (CONI), with a time frame of three years, for ‘The dissemination, practice and implementation of sporting activities for foreign minors hosted in the national reception system’: it is aimed at promoting the social inclusion of UAMs through sport. Its purpose is the local dissemination of sports activities by asking municipal governments and sports clubs to involve UAMs (Accorinti 2014, 128).

In the field of education, on the 11th of December 2017 the Minister of Education, University and Research and the Ombudsman for children and adolescents have signed the guidelines for the right to education of students who live out of their family of origin,⁴ in order to guarantee ‘equal education oppor-

³ More information is available at: http://www.euroformrfs.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Report_-_Buone-pratiche-di-volontariato-FAMI-Milano_IntroFloro-1.pdf

⁴ More information is available at: https://www.garanteinfanzia.org/sites/default/files/Protocollo%20Intesa%20Garante%20infanzia_Miur.pdf

tunities for minors'. The guidelines include concrete indications and suggestions, at all levels, from the governance among different institutions to the classrooms. Both parties commit to the promotion of initiatives aimed at the protection of minors and, above all, the guarantee of the right to education and well-being of unaccompanied minors, minors outside families and minors belonging to ethnic minorities (Rom, Sinti and Caminanti). The agreement promotes the training of actors involved in children's education and the dissemination at school of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Specific for Sicily, another good practice worth mentioning is the Protocol of Palermo.⁵ It is an agreement between the Municipality of Palermo and Palermo Civil Court, Juvenile Court, Prosecutor's Office at the Juvenile Court, Police Headquarters, University of Palermo, Provincial Health Department, Sicilian Regional School Office and the Ombudsman for children and adolescents aimed at protecting vulnerable categories, in particular unaccompanied foreign minors through the establishment of individualised projects of guidance, the institution of a system of volunteer guardians, the institution of a technical table in order to individuate and to solve issues linked to the identification of the minor and the ascertainment of the minor's age. It has been signed also in other municipalities, such as Naples, Bari and Cagliari.

Particularly important is to mention the role of voluntary guardians, introduced by the Zampa Law (2017, Article 11). These are private citizens, appointed by the Juvenile Court, who not only have the legal representation of the minor in all the procedures that con-

⁵ More information is available at: https://www.comune.palermo.it/js/server/uploads/_30012017104927.pdf

cern them, but are also adult figures of reference, attentive to the relationship with the child, who must promote their best interests. A Protocol Agreement has been signed between the Family Court of Catania and the Ombudsman for children and adolescents of the Region of Sicily⁶, for the establishment of the voluntary guardian list, the selection, the training and continuous competence development of such guardians, the establishment of a reference space for the voluntary guardians in order to support the coordination and territorial synergies. In Palermo, in support of the volunteer guardians in their new role, a monitoring and support system has been established. This system provides guidance and advice to the volunteers on how to protect and support children as they move towards social inclusion and make the transition to adulthood.

Among NGOs best practices, the project '*Ragazzi Harraga*' (1st and 2nd editions)⁷ – Social Inclusion Processes for unaccompanied minors in the City of Palermo is worthy of mention. The project, coordinated by CIAI (tr. *Centro Italiano Aiuti all'Infanzia Onlus*) in partnership with the Municipality of Palermo and other local associations and NGOs, is aimed at improving the reception system of unaccompanied minors by promoting models ensuring the protection of children's rights in Italy. It promoted models supporting social inclusion, which took into account the potential, the interests and the expectations of unaccompanied minors in order to facilitate an autonomous and responsible passage to adulthood by involving the Region of Sicily. The project proposed a social inclusion model, which took into account interests and perspectives of minors who are alone in Sicily. The inter-

⁶ More information is available at: https://www.cespi.it/sites/default/files/osservatori/allegati/approf_2_-_tutori_volontari_per_minori_stranieri_non_accompagnati_def.pdf

⁷ More information is available at: <https://ciai.it/progetto/harraga-2/>

vention was based on three dimensions: 1) the social dimension, through the creation of a platform with social folders for each minor featuring all the information concerning their identities, the reception procedures, the inclusion strategies and the hard, soft and transversal skills they have developed; 2) the professional dimension, through the development of an active policy for labour market integration; 3) the housing dimension, by setting up temporary and affordable housing solutions featuring low-cost accommodation for unaccompanied minors in tourist hostels. As a matter of fact, the project (1st edition) has facilitated the job placement of many of the minors involved through the activation of 30 curricular three-month internships with a grant of 300 Euros, and 50 curricular one-month internships. Taking this success into consideration, the representatives of the third sector, in collaboration with other local actors, created a follow-up '*Ragazzi Harraga 2*'⁸, which continued the journey of '*Ragazzi Harraga*' (2017-2019) aimed at consolidating and evolving best practices in the reception of migrant minors according to what has now become the "Harraga Model", a system of innovative pathways to autonomy that embraces social inclusion, training, guidance and job placement for lone migrant minors in the delicate transition to majority.

It is important to underline the fact that in the Sicilian case, the best practices are developed in strong collaboration with the third sector.

All these good practices are aimed at finding solutions for gaps and difficulties in the existing reception system of minors.

⁸ More information is available at: <https://sostienici.ciai.it/prodotto/ragazzi-harraga-2/>.

Protection Gaps and Difficulties in the Italian Reception System

Due to the complexity of the situation “that does not take into account the minors’ needs and vulnerability – the boys’ subjectivity shows their desire to question the constraints and the labelling that consign them to an existence of extreme suffering and marginality” (Sanò 2017), there are, unfortunately, several protection gaps in Italy, which do not permit UAMs to benefit fully from their rights and encourage, among other trends, secondary migration.

Young people often transit through Italy to the UK and France due to the lack of support and long bureaucratic procedures, language factors and desire to be reunited with family members. Jennifer Allsopp in the Research Brief on Unaccompanied minors states that Dublin III procedures are not working effectively and children, who should be able to access legal transfers from Italy to the UK or France, often do not have this opportunity and turn to smugglers instead (Allsopp 2017, 3). According to her 2017 research brief, which at the time of the research stated that ‘as few as 20 reunions of unaccompanied children from Italy with their family members elsewhere in Europe have been completed [...], despite it being likely that several thousand children are eligible’ (ibid.).

Hundreds of unaccompanied children who enter Europe in the South spend months in inadequate facilities and are lacking proper protection. The standards of the reception and hosting facilities are often poor and many UAMs prefer to escape or to continue their journey to Northern Europe. In such cases, they become ‘invisible’ and exposed to a variety of risks. The research, conducted by Catarci and Rocchi provides a following testimony by one of the Egyptian UAMs who described his experience in the reception centre in Sicily, from which he escaped earlier:

[...] then I go to another centre close to Syracuse. I stayed there for one year. First the fingerprints. In Sicily. Nothing. No Speaking. Not doing anything. Only eating and sleeping. There is nothing, no school. One year. Sleeping, eating, playing. One year like that. Afterwards, I took all my clothes and ran away with my friends. Social workers are not all good. 10% good. Small. Sicily is not good. Important to speak Italian and no school to attend. Food is not good. [...] No clothes. Ugly room, not cleaning. (Catarci and Rocchi 2017, 117)

A prolonged stay in these reception centres has extremely negative consequences on minors, mainly because services aimed at social inclusion and at the autonomy of minors, such as training and work placement paths and legal support activities, are not provided. Moreover, these centres have large dimensions, which do not allow the operators to follow the children in an individualised way or to create that family environment to which all the children, according to the Italian law, are entitled. Furthermore, the situation of minors hosted in structures of first and second reception centres is problematic, since they are located far from urban centres, isolated and with little access to services. The number of operators employed in the centres is often lower than the minimum standards. In many cases, they have neither the qualification required by the current legislation, nor sufficient skills and experience. Many structures lack cultural mediators, with the consequences being that the operators are not able to communicate adequately with the children (Catarci and Rocchi 2017, 123). Another problem is the Municipalities' delay in payments, whereby the reception centres often receive the funds with delays of more than a year and therefore they face serious difficulties in covering the costs related to the functioning of the centre. Partly due to delays in payment and due to the decrease in arriv-

als in 2018, many reception centres have been forced to close: some minors have been transferred over and over again from one centre to another, increasingly raising their level of stress. As it has been stressed, in many cases the failure to comply with the standards set by the law is hardly verified and sanctioned by the competent institutions. In fact, both Municipalities and Prefectures often do not ensure appropriate monitoring of the centres.

As anticipated, the MiCREATE results show that a significant number of UAMs suffer from acculturative stress that originates from attempts to integrate the differences between the culture of origin and the dominant culture and is often accompanied by a number of stressful psychosocial experiences.

Research on UAMs and acculturation stress (Rania et al. 2014, 302-307) provides a number of statements by UAMs of different origins who describe their feelings during and after migration:

'Being alone without knowing anyone'. (N., Senegalese, 18 years old)

'Just get used to being alone'. (X., Albanian, 20 years old)

'This was the first time that I remained without my family'. (E., Egyptian, 20 years old)

'No, I do not think that here is like Albania, because there are so many things. I miss my family'. (M., Albanian, 19 years old)

Furthermore, a number of these UAMs also need to urgently find any kind of employment in order to send money home or pay off the debt for their journey to Europe. Therefore, they tend to accept illegal, dangerous and underpaid jobs, and often become the victims of sexual exploitation, forced labour, prostitution, and are forced to perform illegal jobs (Ferrara et al. 2016, 322).

Catarci and Rocchi's research showed that there is a noticeable difference between young migrants who have turned 18 years old and those who are still under 18 years old. The minors under 18

years old seemed more enthusiastic and didn't think much about what was waiting for them outside of the protection system. Those who already turned 18 years old were worried about their future and the uncertain conditions, without any help or protection (Catarci and Rocchi 2017, 122).

However, it is evident that experiences of UAMs in Italy depend on the type and location of reception centres. Research on health challenges in reception centres showed that most of the interviewed UAMs had lived in multiple types of accommodation facilities in remote villages and towns and hence had very little possibility to access any activities that would improve their integration. However, those who live in 'multiple occupancy rooms' in big cities like Catania described them as 'good enough' and stated that there they had opportunities to attend language lessons and different training (Blitz 2017, 12). Other research shows that UAMs in different reception centres voiced complaints about inadequate, minimal and sometimes rotten food, inadequate hygiene supplies, poor health care access, minimal clothing and mistreatment by the workers. Furthermore, there is the existence of an informal communications network where information is exchanged and is much more effective than the institutional channels; the minors have 'their personal knowledge' about reception centres (Sanò 2017, 130-132).

Therefore, different authors state that some of the notable challenges, mentioned by many minors, are: loneliness, difficulties with learning the language, inability to find a job due to being minors, the inability to undergo any educational or employment programme due to the fact that many centres are located in remote rural areas, inadequate, minimal and sometimes rotten food, inadequate hygiene supplies, poor health care access, minimal clothing and mistreatment by the workers.

Reception Facilities in Sicily: The Insights of the MiCREATE Project

The field research started in September 2020, and in its first phase the research team (composed of a researcher and intercultural mediator) mainly focused on contacting agencies and institutions who should respond to UAMs' needs. With selected 44 reception centres in the South, West and central Sicily (Naro, Marsala, Mazzarino) the research team organised an introductory meeting in each of the centres aimed at presenting the research to social workers and UAMs. However, the team was forced to suspend the activities so as to comply with the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) containment measures applied at the local and national level, which strongly restricted mobility, making travelling from one destination to another practically impossible. Access to reception facilities was forbidden so as to prevent contamination, so the research team resumed activities with online meetings through relevant online platforms.

Following the MiCREATE methodology,⁹ with the focus on the best interest of the child and a child-centred approach, interviews were conducted with social workers working in the reception centres (12 online interviews) and migrant boys (33 interviews) in March and April 2021. These interviews were organised to collect information and testimonies about the specific life experiences faced by migrant children in transition in Sicily, including their current situation, understanding of well-being (what they consider important in their current condition), their perceptions, their values, their attitudes and opinions regarding the different aspects of their life in transition: legal residence, education and social protection. The key findings of the research are presented below:

⁹ More information about the methodology is available at: <https://www.micreate.eu/index.php/about-common/>

In general, all research participants had a positive opinion about their experience in the reception centres. They said they are happy about the place they live in. However, if we closely analysed their answers, we noticed their satisfaction is connected to their past experiences and comparisons to Libyan detention camps or poor family houses. This sense of well-being shouldn't be compared to their previous circumstances.

Research results show that the majority of UAMs are not aware of the institutions responsible to guarantee their well-being. Interview respondents (29) do not have any idea of what lawyers do, only 6 of them said they had talked to a lawyer who explained and informed them about the procedure they should follow and provided them with basic information. Only 4 out of 29 children can count on a "real" guardian, who is not the mayor or the centre manager, as they have spent more time in the reception system and are aware of the role of guardians. Just a few of them have visited some medical institutions, but have never met a social worker or other institutional professionals. The centres are left alone managing the UAMs path.

UAMs live their lives inside the centre, their relationships are with those from among their travel mates and their room-mates. They create an atypical relationship with professionals; on the one hand, it is similar to a parent-child relationship, especially with female social workers (who are often called mothers). On the other hand, it is characterised by several expectations towards the community manager, the only person who is in charge of all the things concerning UAMs (providing information about legal issues, pocket money, education and training, moral support) and has a pivotal role. This kind of relationship, even though it is strong from a human point of view, is dysfunctional and inefficient regarding any legal aspects. UAMs are not aware of the procedures they need to deal with, as the manager does it all.

Respondents said they were often surprised and they wondered about bureaucratic processes.

I don't know how long I am supposed to stay here. I want to study and have my documents so that I can work to help my family. I don't know what to do, because I don't have any information about the procedure. They keep telling me that I need to wait... what am I waiting for? The lawyer keeps telling me 'wait and see...wait and see'...

Another clear aspect resulting from interviews is the lack of integration with the local community, as well as of integration support services; as one of the UAMs pointed out "I am not happy because I don't do anything, I don't work out, I don't play football. I have always been playing football since I lived in Guinea, I do nothing here".

In addition, a series of obstacles that prevent children from obtaining a residence permit have been highlighted by the research participants. In some police stations, filing an asylum application takes a lot of time and some Police Headquarters do not issue permits for minors when the minor has no passport, and this is the case for the majority of UAMs arriving in Italy. As a result, children often remain for months without any residence permit, which makes it very difficult for them to enrol in the National Health Service and to begin any social inclusion programme such as attending vocational training courses or internships. Research participants noted that it is also very stressful from a psychological point of view.

In the most isolated centres, the right to education is not granted even if at least 30% of respondents said they are willing to finish middle school. However, the situation appears critical when thinking about their future learning path since the municipalities where the centres are located do not have any vocational centre migrant

children would like to attend, therefore they are forced to register to courses they are not interested in and which make the time they spend in the centre even more complicated and frustrating.

Most of the research participants describe their overall experience of reception as *‘eating and sleeping’* – many of them are hosted in the centres, located in remote areas, where they cannot undergo any educational or employment programme, including Italian courses.

Finally, when children hosted in the Italian reception facilities come to the age of majority, every support measure ceases. At that age, children rarely have a contract of employment and generally still have to complete their school and training path, therefore they cannot be independent. The abrupt interruption of any reception and support intervention generally interrupts the evidence of the inclusion path undertaken. Many of these young adults end up living on the street. The problem, already present, has been worsened by the introduction of the so-called ‘Security Decree’, which deleted the humanitarian protection, hence minors turning 18 years old without humanitarian protection will be condemned to social exclusion.

Conclusions and Limitations

The research revealed that most of the reception centres pay attention only to the basic needs, not taking into the consideration the right to be heard or other participatory rights. Listening to UAMs and creating an individual learning path for each one of them is not a part of the procedures of the centres, therefore migrant children are mainly ignored and pushed to adhere to a “one size fits all” integration and inclusion programmes, which have been imposed upon them. Such a course of action facilitates the management procedures, since the personnel working in the centres are already aware of the bureaucratic and institutional ob-

stacles and issues that might emerge if all the subjects involved in the reception procedure participate in the decision-making process, therefore they prefer a standardised and simpler alternative.

All in all, the best interests of the child as the first guiding principle of the protection system for minors is not taken into account very much, as expressed by the participants of the research. Children are barely consulted about the matters concerning their own life, they do suffer from social exclusion, also due to their legal status, low levels and inadequate education and employment opportunities.

The field research conducted within the scope of the MiCRE-ATE project must continue research on the gaps in the application of the child-centred approach within the reception system, and provide further recommendations to support migrant children in transition.

We tried to make this research as comprehensive as possible, however, it is subject to several limitations. Firstly, although the online technology supported an implementation of the interviews during the period of the pandemic, we need to state that it was also an obstacle, as face to face meeting would help in creating a more personal contact with these children and to get more specific answers to the research questions. Secondly, during the interview they were accompanied by a social worker from the reception centre. In such cases, we think that a feeling of fear or 'of saying something bad' had a place in this situation. Implementing interviews without them would provide a more detailed picture. Additionally, the language barrier also brings some misunderstanding in the communication process. In particular, this research was implemented in collaboration with a cultural mediator. A translation from the children's native language to Italian or back challenged every dynamic of the ongoing work. Thus, it is important to under-

line the role of a mediator/researcher, who knows the child's native language, as well as time are both essential for research activities, as there is a need to create a comfortable and trustful environment between the researcher and the child.

Finally, this work concentrates on a particular Sicilian framework, and in the case of other local/regional conditions, future studies are needed to validate the outcomes of the present work.

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